

Remarks by Amb. Quinn in December 2013

REMEMBRANCES OF RICH WILLIAMSON

My name is Kenneth Quinn. I am from Des Moines, Iowa. I was a colleague of Rich in the State Department, and I served as his deputy at the US Mission to the United Nations in Vienna.

Jane; Le Son and I were stunned and heartbroken when the news of Rich's passing reached us. All of the Quinn's, including our children Davin, Shandon and Kelly send their love and embrace to you and your family at this difficult time

Lisa, Craig, Ricky, I loved your Dad! Just as we love your Mom and feel so close to your family.

Maybe that would seem like an unusual thing for a foreign-policy colleague to say about another. You might expect me to say how much I admired and respected Rich, and of course I did.

But, it is an especially unusual thing for a career State Department officer to say about a political appointee.

The popular view is that we career diplomats lived in trepidation of having a non-career politician serving as your ambassador. And that was certainly the case with Rich Williamson when he was appointed as the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations agencies in Vienna.

He was, after all, at age 33, one of the youngest ambassadors ever appointed. And he was a hard charger who had come from the take-no-prisoners world of presidential politics. And, even worse, he had no foreign policy experience nor any apparent interest in it.

We were terrified!

Then the Williamsons arrived, and we met Jane and little Lisa and Craig. I thought – anyone that this wonderful woman married and who has such adorable children, couldn't be so bad.

So, when Rich and I first spoke, maybe it was the fact that I had worked with the Republican governor of Iowa, we immediately had a connection. I became his deputy and we had two incredible years together, both professionally and personally.

Rich transformed the US Mission in Vienna with his energy, intellectual acumen and his vision. He imparted to our staff the critical role we could play on the issues we faced – and they were big issues: The Atomic Energy Agency; Israeli – Palestinian interaction in places like Gaza and Lebanon; and international narcotics control.

We were suddenly doing things that had never happened before: reporting on political and military actions in Lebanon before the US Embassy in Beirut could do it; providing input on

narcotics trafficking along the Pakistan – Afghanistan border; reporting abuses of UN facilities by terrorist organizations who built military command centers under UN schools.

But as committed and involved as Rich was to his work, his family was always front and center. Jane and Le Son were both pregnant during our time in Vienna, and Ricky and our daughter Kelly were born just a few months apart at the Rudolfiner Haus hospital.

We spent wonderful family time together, and it was there that the connection and affection I felt for Rich grew. Our families had Thanksgiving dinner together at the Williamsons apartment at number seven Rathaus Strasse – a traditional, early 20th century building along the Ring Strasse, and next to City Hall. It was the building where Sigmund Freud had his first office.

On Christmas Day, after opening their presents, the Williamsons would come to the Quinn home on the edge of the Vienna Woods. I remember Ricky and Shandon, who were just three or four years old, riding endless circles through the kitchen and living room on the new electric tricycle, almost knocking Jane and Le Son over as they were preparing Christmas dinner.

Far from home, far from family and friends, the Williamsons and the Quinn's became family.

Speaking of presents, Rich loved Christmas and loved having presents for his kids. I learned that when one day in early December, around the 3rd or 4th, I came into his office to speak to him about some policy issue, and he was wrapping Christmas presents at his desk. He kept wrapping as we talked. He explained to me that Christmas was the best day of the year, and he didn't want to miss any of it by wrapping presents the night before (as I was planning to do) and then being too tired on Christmas day to enjoy it. And, there were so many presents. Lisa told me that Rich continued this practice of many, many presents for them well into when they were grown adults.

The Christmas experience was so important to Rich that he even played Santa Claus for the children of the entire US Embassy in Vienna. Our son Davin, who was a first grader at the time, said he remembered sitting on Santa's lap without realizing it was Mr. Williamson. How many American ambassadors, anywhere in the world, have ever played Santa? Aside from a few of them whom you think were probably giving too many things away.

Rich would've loved that line.

The Quinn – Williamson family connection continued in a small chapel in Grinzing when Rich and Jane became godparents to our daughter Kelly.

1985, our Vienna connection suddenly was over. Rich returned to Chicago and I transferred to Washington to work for Secretary of State George Schultz. But our relationship and that of our two families continued and our paths would cross in memorable ways:

- – I remember Rich arranging for a hotel room and special treatment for us at Disney World that year. We wanted to go for Christmas but were told that there wasn't a room left in the entire complex. After Rich called, suddenly we had a room at the best hotel and prime seating at the Hoop Dee Doo review.

-- Rich and Jane visited us in the Philippines, even though there was a significant terrorist threat;

--In 1992 during Rich's Senate campaign, I recall a blizzard grounded all flights and stranded me at O'Hare. Even though he was exhausted from his political campaigning, Rich told me to come to their house and then got out of bed and opened the door at 1 AM to give me refuge from the storm. That's the kind of person Rich was; always doing kind things for friends.

--He also asked Sen. McCain to introduce me at my confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to be ambassador to Cambodia. He then came to Cambodia in the midst of civil unrest and we worked together to ensure that the genocidal Khmer Rouge could never return to power.

-- There were also several wonderful visits by our family to the Williamson home in Saugatuck.

--And I recall being in this very church to watch Rich walk Lisa down the aisle at her wedding. You know Rich Williamson was always a strong guy in any situation, but I wasn't sure he was going to be able to make it that day because he was so filled with his love for his daughter.

But just as Rich brought energy and innovation to the US Mission in Vienna, his experience there transformed him as well. He was no longer just focused on the impact US politics could have on Americans. He saw the impact US policy could have on people all over the world. And so Rich would begin his odyssey for the next 30 years which would lead him to being one of the most powerful voices and leaders in the Republican Party, in the US government and at the United Nations on the issues of human rights, freedom, democracy, national security and alleviating human suffering.

As Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, he supported building the UN World Food Program into the most effective organization in history in bringing emergency food and aid to hungry and starving people; and for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to become a powerful advocate and protector. Rich's forceful statements about "The responsibility to protect" in response to the Rwanda massacre still resonate. He said

"acting to prevent more suffering is the challenge to our conscience, our humanity, our country and the world."

Through his service as US Ambassador to the Human Rights Council; at the UN in New York; and as the Presidential Special Envoy for Sudan; he focused on the world's worst humanitarian crisis-- in Darfur.

Rich's writing reflected the passion he brought to those issues as well as the compassion he felt for individuals who were straining for freedom and relief from dictators and oppression. Rich often told stories about individual persons affected by situations in order to bring home his point. For example he told about Oussama, a 47-year-old Tunisian, who told Rich he saw the Arab Awakening as "A new day for my sons." This resonated with Rich who had two sons himself.

As a leader of the International Republican Institute, Rich was seemingly everywhere with an informed and insightful message. His statements were cogent, well-reasoned, candid critiques and calls for action. He wrote about China, Russia, Kosovo, the former Soviet states, Egypt and Benghazi. I even got him to come to Des Moines once to talk about agricultural development in Africa, and as usual, he stole the show.

I was always in awe of Rich's prose, which could often come across as poetry. In 2003, condemning the militias in Sudan known as the Janjaweed, he described them as

"...those Devils on horseback or camels, who swooped into villages, burning homes, destroying crops, poisoning wells, killing boys, raping girls and then branding their thighs with hot knives."

Rich had the most powerful voice on the planet at the UN Human Rights Council, urging no compromise or immunity for those doing these war crimes. To those who argued that we had to compromise on these principles in order to move forward to address problems, he said:

"Embracing human rights and promoting democracy is not an impediment to a pragmatic approach to the world. It is a sound and prudent way to advance American interests. Doing so is true to our history and heritage, to our virtues and values, to our dreams and destiny."

Those words should be carved in stone as they define Rich Williamson's professional career and his admonition and guidance to us for the future.

The Williamson – Quinn connection came full circle in August 2012, when despite being the closest national security adviser to presidential candidate Mitt Romney, Rich and Jane made the drive from Chicago to Des Moines-- just as Le Son and I drove here yesterday-- to be at our son Shandon's wedding.

It was the last time we ever saw Rich. I remember watching him interact with all the thirty something guests and out on the dance floor and thinking how good I would feel about our country with Rich as the National Security Advisor at the White House in a Romney administration.

The other memory from that wedding was our watching together the slide show of our son Shandon growing up. For there suddenly were pictures of Lisa and Craig, just starting grade school in Vienna with Davin and Shandon. They were followed by slides of our now middle school age kids together at Saugatuck: Craig and Shandon driving go carts and Kelly and Ricky in the bumper boats, because they were too small for the go-carts. Sorry to mention that, Ricky.

When I wrote to Rich to thank him and Jane for being at the wedding, he wrote back saying the slide show brought back;

" A flood of joyous memories – of the many precious years during which your wonderful family and mine have been tied together through shared experiences, laughter and fun."

But if I were to think about just one image that would capture all of this today, it would be the video of our two families together in Saugatuck in front of the Williamson's house watching the sun slowly set over Lake Michigan. We followed the sun as it dropped and just at the moment the sun was no longer visible, there was at that same time a glorious radiance, a red glow, that filled the sky with reflected beauty.

That memory captures this moment. Rich has been our sun providing warmth and direction, energy and nourishment to his family, to his party, to our government, to our country, to all of us. Even though Rich's sun has now set, the beauty and glory that he has nurtured and cultivated in his life will continue to be reflected through his wonderful family, his words and his deeds, far into the future as Rich's great legacy.

